

# The Salt Lake Tribune

WEDNESDAY, September 27, 2006

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Article Last Updated: 09/19/2006 12:32:58 AM MDT

## Nightmare now reality for many: No recess

**Academic pressures are squeezing out breaks, but fitness advocates say they are not expendable**

**By Celia R. Baker**  
**The Salt Lake Tribune**

Augusta Scott, 6, likes doing flips on the bars. Peyton Scott, 7, favors a fast-paced game of tag. Wilder Koeven, 10, chooses to walk the school playground with friends, talking about "stuff" - such as the Yu-Gi-Oh cards they collect and "all types of fun things kids like."

Ah, recess - that brief-but-blessed release from desk work and drudgery. Don't you miss it?

Kids are missing it, too.

As teachers strive to meet new accountability requirements, time for recess is being squeezed out. A national Parent Teacher Association study estimates that nearly 40 percent of U.S. elementary schools have either eliminated or are considering eliminating recess.

Earl Arnoldson, principal of Rose Park's North Star Elementary, said ensuring that kids get enough recess time and other physical activity is "a struggle." All students at his school get a 30-minute morning recess, but older students often miss out on the school's afternoon break to increase instructional time, Arnoldson said.

However, North Star seeks to keep its students active through participation in the Gold Medal school fitness program and its new school wellness policy, which mandates 90 minutes of physical activity per week for all



Rose Park students get physical at North Star Elementary, where every student has at least one recess. (Leah Hogsten/The Salt Lake Tribune )

students. It also celebrates National Recess Week, which began Monday and continues through Friday.

Antonia Scott, Augusta's mom, appreciates all efforts to keep her daughter active at school.

"I think it's vital," Scott said. "As obesity goes up around the country, it makes no sense to cut out the things schools have going, such as time for physical activity."

As a Gold Medal school, days at North Star begin with a five-minute warm-up that changes monthly. As music pulses through the school's public-address system, P.E. specialist Chrysy Barbosa runs from one classroom "pod" to another, leading this month's routine of ski jumps, upper cuts and running in place.

During recess, Barbosa supervises an optional daily kickball game with students of all grades, using a big, orange ball emblazoned with the logo of the Cartoon Network, which donated playground materials to 87 Utah schools as part of its "Recess Rally" program.

Barbosa has a trick for encouraging older students to welcome younger ones into the game:

"We don't count the first-graders' outs," she said. "Don't tell them."

Each class has a weekly P.E. session with Barbosa that focuses on developing skills.

"I have some teachers who hold kids back from P.E.," she said. "We need to have different ways to discipline

students. The ones who are held out are the ones who really need the extra movement."

Research assembled by the Cartoon Network suggests that including physical activity in the school day can improve educational outcomes. One study showed that "fourth-graders were more on-task and less fidgety in the classroom on days when they had recess, with hyperactive children among those who benefited the most."

Barbosa said North Star's new school wellness policy, a federal requirement about to be implemented, states that recess cannot be used as a reward or punishment.

Cartoon Network, a possible contributor to kids' couch-potato habits at home, wants kids to strike a good balance between watching television and being active, said Dennis Adamovich, senior vice-president for marketing - hence its

push to rescue recess.

"We're telling kids to get off the couch and get outside, which is a bold move for a TV network to make," Adamovich said. "We don't want to have kids sitting in front of TVs munching down on a bunch of bad food. We want them to go outside. Overindulgence in one area is a bad thing."

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The perks of playtime

• Paying attention often requires novelty. Kids learn better when their efforts are distributed over time rather than in longer sessions.

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Play is an active form of learning that unites the mind, body and spirit.

Children learn to understand other people's viewpoints, cooperate, help others and solve problems.

Children develop social skills during recess.

Recess is fun!

Source: Studies assembled by Cartoon Network. See [http://www.rescuingrecess.com/get\\_informed/advocacypoints/](http://www.rescuingrecess.com/get_informed/advocacypoints/)

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